

Belle Helene Plantation, Geismar,  
Ascension Parish, Louisiana

HABS No. La.- 80

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Louisiana

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Richard Koch, District Officer  
309 Stern Building, New Orleans, Louisiana

ADDITIONAL  
REMARKS

BELLE HELENE PLANTATION

Geismar ~~VICTORY~~ Ascension Parish

Louisiana

Owner: Mrs. George B. Reuss

Date of Erection: 1841

Builder: Duncan Kenner

Architect: Unknown (perhaps James Gallier, Jr.)

Present Condition: Poor.

Number of Stories: Two

Materials of Construction: Brick, cement-stuccoed walls; hipped tin roof - was purple slate - with heavy wood cornice; colonnade of brick, cemented.

Other existing Records:

Saxon, Lyle; Old Louisiana - The Century Company,  
New York and London, 1929

Spratling, William P. and Scott, Natalie; Old Plantation  
Houses in Louisiana - William Helburn, Inc, New York, 1927

Additional Data:

Seven miles above the Darrow ferry, facing the Mississippi River across a great mall and backed by enormous oaks, stands Belle Helene, one of the most impressive examples of the Greek Revival in Louisiana. Its faded yellow washed walls, the gray woodwork and the small peak of purple slate roof showing above the heavy Greek cornice leaves an unforgettable impression of simplicity as achieved by the plantation builders during the most affluent period of Louisiana's history. We have become so accustomed to seeing the plantation house through the vista of a large avenue of oaks that we sense a realization of new ideas. Was it perhaps inspired by the romantic trend of

England where the houses were being placed with extensive views over large meadows and the allées destroyed?

In plan the house is square, surrounded by a colonnade with eight columns on each face; a large hall through the center gives access to the principal rooms, and, off the end of this hall, is a well designed circular stairway that leads to the second story. The rooms are large and now bare - but what a background for the rosewood furniture and accessories that Ashland Plantation (as Belle Helene was then known) no doubt had!

The house is built of brick and stuccoed; the floors are of pine as are also the galleries; the columns are square - not round as is usual in Louisiana; the details are Greek Revival, taken no doubt from one of the architectural handbooks of Asher Benjamin or Minard Lefevre which were then current.

Built in 1841 by Duncan Kenner, a prominent planter of the day, who in 1839 married Nanine Brangier of the adjoining HERMITAGE Plantation, ASHLAND was the center of the social and political life of this rich sugar section prior to the Civil War. Duncan Kenner was elected to the Confederate Congress and was special commissioner and minister plenipotentiary to France in 1863. It is interesting to note that he urged Jefferson Davis to free the slaves.

May 5, 1937

APPROVED:

Richard Koch, District Officer  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS  
SURVEY IN LOUISIANA

DATA NOT COMPILED AND NOT GUARANTEED  
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ADDENDUM TO:  
Ashland-Belle Helene Plantation  
Geismar Vic.  
Ascension County  
Louisiana

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127